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ABSTRACT

This article presents the rationale and techniques of the Adolescent Therapy Club which encourages experiences that facilitate optimal social/emotional development in a non-threatening counseling group. The role of the school counselor in teaching students to be group members and moderating activities and discussions is described. Student responsibilities for successful group functioning are outlined. The paper discusses the club's operational philosophy and describes group activities which encourage positive self esteem and peer relationships while allowing opportunities for the counselor to model encouragenic behavior. (Author/JAC)

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The Adolescent Therapy Club: An Encouragenic Support Group

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The Adolescent Therapy Club: An Encouragenic Support Group* - Ray B. Rich, M.Ed.

The adolescent therapy club operates on two premises: that encouraging experiences facilitate optimal social/emotional development, and that interpersonal relationships hold the maximum potential for encouragement. Therefore, the club is organized to foster encouragenic behavior patterns, and facilitate mutually encouragenic relationships, while acting as a support group for its members.

Ground Rules:

The ground rules for the club are simple and direct. Each member is to be helpful and cooperative, honest and sincere. Constructive criticism is allowed, when the critic can demonstrate the helpfulness of her remarks. When unhelpful criticism is presented, others will attempt to demonstrate how the critic could have been more helpful. Making mistakes is o.k., when we are willing to profit from them. Thus, the courage of imperfection is nurtured, while honest, cooperative effort is encouraged. This mutual respect is extended to include confidential treatment of all that transpires in the group.

Counselor's Tasks:

It is the counselor's first task to teach the students how to be group members. Beyond that, the students are informed that it is to be their club: That they will determine the direction and activities of the club, within the boundaries specified above. The counselor clearly specifies what he is willing to do for the group and acts as moderator in all discussions and activities. The counselor may present mini lectures and lead discussions, to facilitate the personal/social growth of the members, if requested. The counselor may suggest activities, and provide guidance in activities, but group consensus determines what the activities will be. Thus the club is a model of democracy-in-action, where the counselor's primary functions are to insure that the rights of each member are respected, and to model encouragenic response patterns.

Operational Philosophy:

In the author's experience, club members have willingly taken on the responsibilities necessary for successful functioning of the group. After the initial year of the club, veteran members play an important role in intergrating new members into the group. However, cooperation and helpfulness are the traits

*Note: This club has been conducted under the name "Behavioral Sciences Club."

encouraged, rather than "leadership."* Thus an atmosphere of equality, cooperation, and encouragement is maintained.

Because of the egalitarian philosophy and student designed activities of the club, a great deal of responsibility befalls both the counselor and students. Each individual is responsible for controlling their own behavior to the extent of demonstrating respect for the rights of every other member. The goal is to be optimally self and other encouraging. An exploration of the dynamics of self-esteem and social interest reveals the factors facilitating encouragenic experiences for each member.

Operational Style:

The early weeks of the club generally involve open discussions on human behavior, with the counselor volunteering his views on the underlying motivations of behavior. Since this author's theoretical orientation is primarily Adlerian/Rational Emotive, an exploration of the members' basic life style convictions, (self concept, self ideal, environmental evaluation, and ethical convictions (Mosak & Dreikurs, 1973)), and possible mistaken beliefs ensues. Techniques for enhancing self-esteem become evident in exposing the negative nonsense inherent in descrepancies between one's self concept and the other convictions. Ideally, members help one another cognitively dispute their irrational ideas, while club activities provide opportunities to behaviorally dispute them. Discrepancies between self concept and any of the other life style convictions can constrict self-esteem, however, our efforts have focused on the search for perfection and identity frequently wrapped up in self ideal convictions. O'Connell (1978) has projected identity as an ego constricting cognition.

Techniques for enhancing social-interest are most evident in contrasting the individual's environmental evaluation and ethical convictions with the apparent demands of society. Other people are part of our environment. Labeling and categorizing them, judging them by our values, and demanding that they behave accordingly is mutually discouraging. Therefore, we must frequently modify both our thinking and behavior, to become more self and other encouraging. O'Connell and Bright (1977) have outlined thirteen "Elements of the Encouragement Process," which are excellent stimulators of discussion. Relating encouragenically toward others increases the probability that they will relate to us similarly. Therefore, while some people are "fighting for their rights," this author suggests that we each treat the other as if we are earning the privilege of being with that person

*Note: Club membership has been open to all students in grades 10, 11, & 12. A student could participate for one, two, or all three years.

again. This attitude fosters a mutual respect which is universally encouragenic. Very often we get what we give.

The club engages in a wide range of activities, providing the counselor a variety of situations in which to model encouragenic behavior. Club activities include weekly discussion meetings, social gatherings (e.g.: holiday parties, sledding and skating parties), and educational field trips. A further description of club activities and suggestions for adoption/implimentation of the adolescent therapy club concept is available (Rich, 1979).

References

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